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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000567

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER ON U.S. VISIT, AYMAN NOUR,  
AND POSSIBLE DELAY IN COUNTER-TERROR LEGISLATION

REF: A. 2007 CAIRO 3066  
[1](#)B. CAIRO 534

Classified By: Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a March 12 meeting with the Ambassador, Speaker of the Egyptian People's Assembly, Ahmed Fathi Surour, highlighted his satisfaction with his early March visit to Washington. He complained about Congressional focus on imprisoned former Al Ghad party leader Ayman Nour, and detailed his alleged efforts to get Nour released. Surour openly worried about the political threat posed by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and hinted that President Mubarak may extend the Emergency Law at the end of May, rather than enact promised new counter-terrorism legislation. The Ambassador warned that this would be problematic from the USG's perspective, and stressed the importance of open debate and discussion among Egyptians of all political stripes on the issue. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Surour waxed ecstatic about his March 1-7 visit to the U.S. (organized through a USAID-funded parliamentary exchange program), noting that it was the best trip he had ever taken to the U.S., and highlighting the positive impressions he had taken away from his numerous meetings in Washington. Surour said that on March 10 he had briefed the People's Assembly on his visit, and that he had stressed the importance of dialogue with Congress, blaming Arab parliamentarians for not vigorously engaging with their counterparts on the Hill.

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AYMAN NOUR  
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[1](#)3. (C) The only apparent low point of the trip, according to Surour, was the repeated questions he received about Ayman Nour: "Why are they so focused on this forger? It is a criminal case, not a political one." Surour, in a lengthy, emotional monologue, complained that Nour and his wife Gameela Ismail's public criticism of the GOE, including of Surour, "makes things more difficult .... They are not winning friends, and are not helping us do this (release him), with these constant attacks on the government in the newspapers." Surour asserted that, prior to his departure for the U.S., he asked Mubarak to release Nour, arguing that his continued detention needlessly exposes Egypt to international pressure and criticism. Mubarak, with Surour still in the room, allegedly called presidential chief of staff Zakariya Azmy, and told him that, "I have no objection to releasing Nour, if it is done in accordance with the law. Study the option of releasing him with the Ministry of Justice." Surour opined that Ismail "is the reason behind the delay in getting Nour released," commenting that, "for a year, there's been a desire to release him, but all the

letters and articles authored by his wife make it extremely difficult. I know how to work with Mubarak to modify his opinions. You can change his mind if you work diplomatically with him. But he does not like being pressured publicly."

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COUNTER-TERRORISM LAW MAY BE DELAYED  
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14. (C) When queried by the Ambassador on the progress of the new Counter-Terrorism law (ref A), Surour said that the Ministry of Justice is still reviewing the latest draft. He mused that the fundamental challenge of the law is to appropriately balance the basic rights of the citizen with the protection of society from terrorist violence, highlighting the Minister of Interior's concern about releasing the large number of prisoners that are currently detained in Egyptian prisons, without trial, under the auspices of the Emergency Law. "The Minister has said very clearly, that if some of these people are released, they will kill the next day." Surour asked the Ambassador, "What if the Emergency Law was prolonged?" The Ambassador replied that such an eventuality was undesirable, and would be bad for Egypt, both domestically and internationally. It would contradict an important promise of Mubarak's 2005 election campaign. He recommended that, as Egypt struggles with this difficult and complicated issue, Surour encourage an open and extended debate in the People's Assembly, so that both the government and opposition can make their case to the Egyptian people, and all views, including those of Egypt's leading human rights activists, are aired. Surour made a point of noting that he would not speak before parliament in favor of extending the Emergency Law - "I can only advocate on behalf of freedom."

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MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD  
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15. (C) Surour, in an unusually reflective mood, mused about the political threat of the MB, and the possibility that stringent GOE measures to prevent MB candidates from participating in the April 8 local council elections might leave the group with only non-democratic means to take on the government. Surour alleged that the MB won 88 seats in the 2005 parliamentary elections "because they received funding from Arab states, because there are poor, ignorant people who believe their religious slogans, and because of some mistakes made by the government." Surour made no predictions for the outcome of the upcoming local council races. The Ambassador reminded Surour of our standing diplomatic practice of meeting all MP's, including oppositionists and independents, who wish to meet with US diplomats. He noted that Surour might meet with some MB MP's, just as she meets with ruling party and other opposition MP's. Surour raised no objection or concerns.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) Surour's comments, as well as other recent hints from GOE contacts (ref B) and plugged-in parliamentarians, make clear that the GOE is likely to miss the May 31 deadline to enact the new counter-terrorism legislation, and will instead re-extend the Emergency Law (which has been in force since 1981).

RICCIARDONE